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# The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

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# Mockumentary

## Tanner '88 [1988]

As early as *Nashville*, Robert Altman had had his actors mingle with the real stars of the Country & Western music capital. *Tanner '88* is a much more ambitious and sly blending of documentary and fiction, written by Doonesbury creator Garry Trudeau and set during the presidential primary season of 1988. It was created as an 11-episode miniseries for HBO and follows the campaign of fictional presidential candidate and former Michigan Representative Jack Tanner as he campaigns against Jesse Jackson and Michael Dukakis. One reviewer described this as “a kind of guerrilla filmmaking” and likened Altman to a sculptor using “found materials” since the other candidates were not told in advance that this fictional candidate would be among them on the primary circuit. The series was rebroadcast in 2004 to coincide with presidential primaries that year.

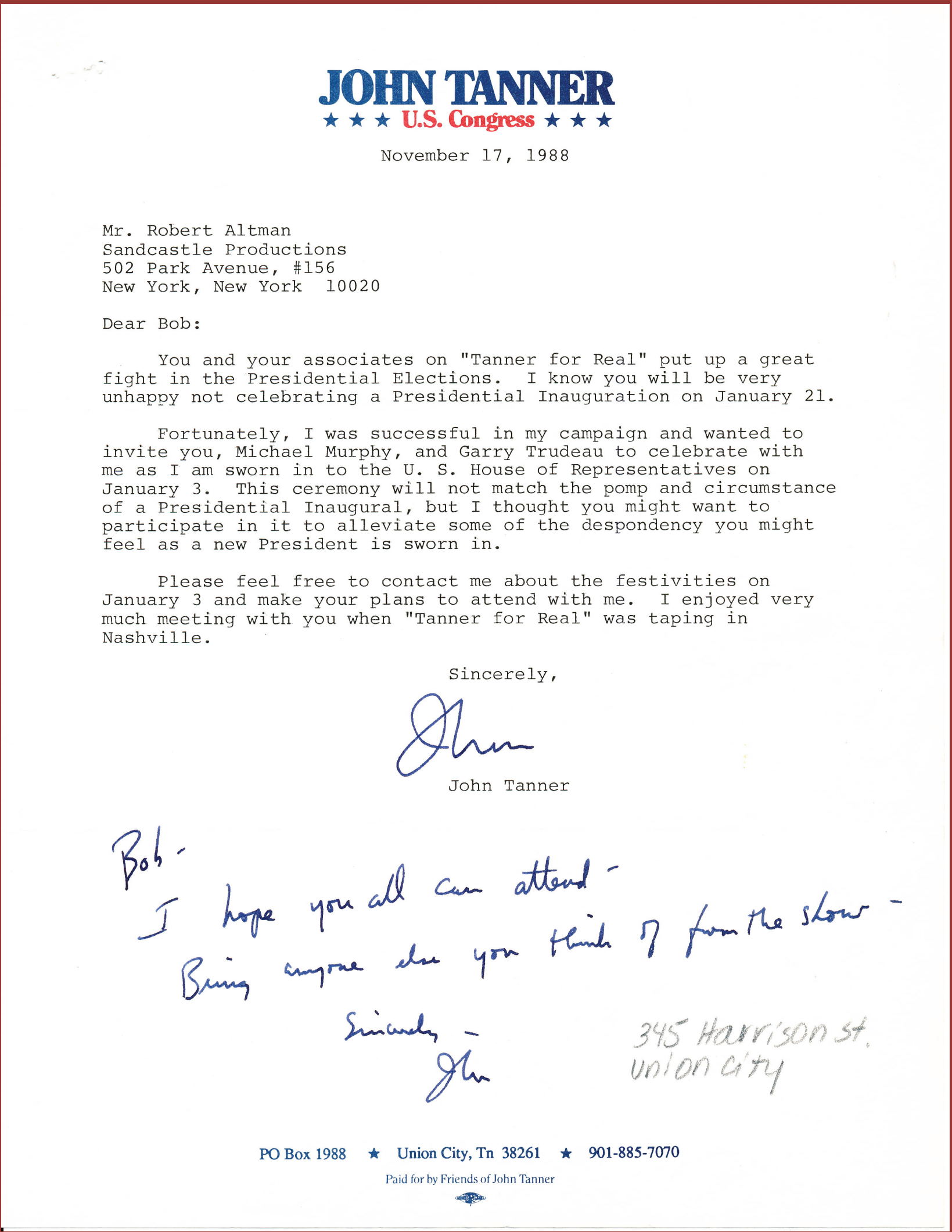


Photograph of Michael Murphy as Jack Tanner talking to reporters. Taking stances on contemporary political issues, Jack Tanner (center) speaks to a group of supporters holding signs asking the U.S. to sanction South Africa for aiding the Angolan political party UNITA and to stop U.S. aid to it as well. Altman’s crew would commonly film episodes of *Tanner '88* at actual political events and rallies.

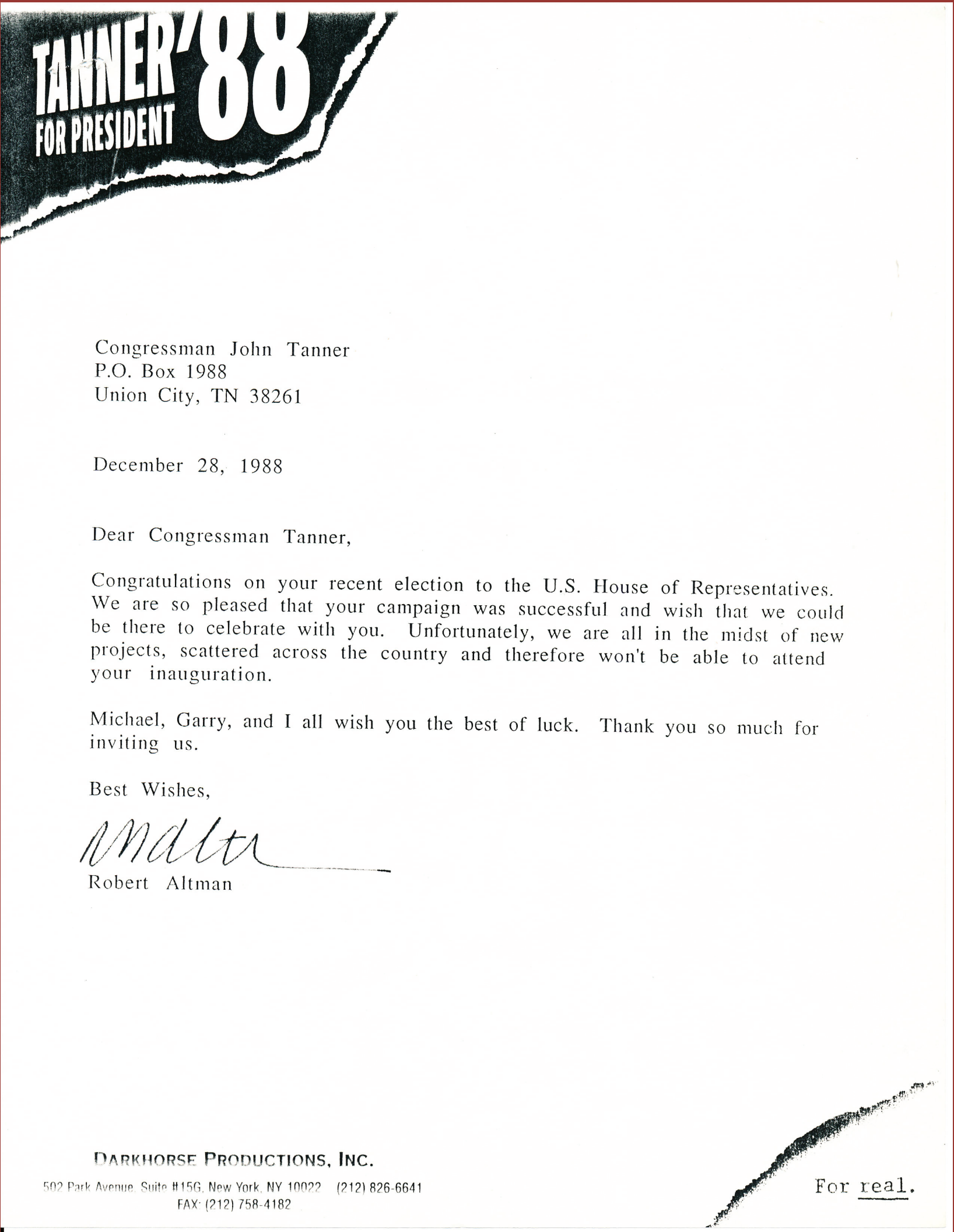


Photograph during the New Hampshire primaries, 1988. Fictional candidate for the Democratic nomination Jack Tanner (right, Michael Murphy) and daughter Alex (Cynthia Nixon) meet a real Republican candidate, Senator Robert Dole, in New Hampshire in *Tanner '88*: Episode “Dark Horse.”

Coincidentally, there was a John Tanner also campaigning while *Tanner '88* was being broadcast. John Tanner (not to be confused with Jack Tanner, the character of the series) was successfully elected to Congress from Tennessee, and here humorously shares his condolences on Jack Tanner’s loss and invites Altman, actor Michael Murphy, and writer/producer Garry Trudeau to attend the celebration when he is sworn into office.



John Tanner, typed letter to Robert Altman, November 17, 1988.



Robert Altman, typed letter to John Tanner, December 28, 1988.